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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000643

SIPDIS

COMMERCE FOR ITA - BURRESS

DEPARTMENT PASS USAID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2019

TAGS: ECON KCOR PGOV PHUM SOCI CM

SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S NEW PRIME MINISTER - FOCUS ON THE
ECONOMY

REF: A. YAOUNDE 591

1B. 09YAOUNDE 357

Classified By: Ambassador Janet E. Garvey for reasons 1.4 (d) and (e)

11. (C) Summary: On July 16, Ambassador made an initial courtesy call on Philemon Yang, named Cameroon's new Prime Minister in a June 30 Cabinet shuffle (ref A). Yang said his priority would be the economy. He praised the independence of members of the Electoral Commission, saying the 2011 presidential election timetable would stay on track. He did not know about a pending shortage of anti-retroviral drugs and suggested that corruption-related arrests would continue.

Yang is a former diplomat and technocrat, loyal to Biya, intellectual, and open to engaging us. Unfortunately, he did not come across as someone who will push new ideas or reenergize the bureaucracy. End summary.

Spurring the Economy

12. (SBU) Yang said he took his cue from President Biya's priorities, which are to boost agriculture, animal husbandry and the energy sector, while ensuring movement on mining projects. "We don't have a choice" in these areas, Yang affirmed, adding that Biya was concerned about bureaucratic inertia and slow progress on the economy. Yang saw promise in agribusiness and noted Cameroon's importance as a food producer for the region. He also noted the need to improve performance in the social sector, including in education and health. Ambassador welcomed the economic focus, highlighting the need to improve budget execution. She noted U.S. company interest in Cameroon, including in the mining and agriculture sectors.

Elections

13. (C) Yang thought the presidential elections scheduled for 2011 would stay on track, despite continued public speculation that the dates might be moved forward. No decision had been made about the expected creation of a Senate or elections to fill it, he said. The recently created Electoral Commission (ELECAM) is getting organized, hiring staff across the country, with the budget and legal status needed to function. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, which used to run elections, will gradually lose its power over electoral functions, Yang said, adding that "ELECAM will be independent but not divorced from government," with powers to commandeer vehicles and request assistance from other government entities.

14. (SBU) Ambassador stressed the importance of free, fair

and credible elections in 2011 and noted that we (and much of the Cameroon public) remain unconvinced about ELECAM's ability to run good elections. Yang emphasized President Biya's belief that an unfair election is meaningless. Yang praised the independence, strong convictions and intellectual "stubbornness" of the individuals chosen to run ELECAM. He said the government has found no evidence against Samuel Fonkam Azu'u, the President of ELECAM accused of corruption, and urged us to keep an open mind and liaise directly with ELECAM. Yang opined that there were too many political parties in Cameroon and that fewer parties would be healthier for democracy.

ARVs

¶15. (SBU) Ambassador briefed Yang on the shortage of anti-retroviral (ARV) stocks for HIV/AIDS patients and our concerns that some 65,000 people may face a cut-off of ARVs as early as September (ref B). Yang did not know about the ARV problem and said he would check on the situation with the Minister of Health. Yang lamented that past corruption in the health sector hampered Cameroon's ability to seek new assistance.

Corruption

¶16. (SBU) Ambassador praised the GRC's ongoing anti-corruption initiative (dubbed "Operation Sparrowhawk") and corruption-related arrests. Yang acknowledged that corruption had tainted Cameroon's international image but

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said Sparrowhawk ("Eparvier" in French) was "about the future, not the past". He hoped that "those who went or may go to jail" for corruption will send a signal to the rest of the country that corruption will be punished.

Comment

¶17. (C) We have worked productively with Yang for years in his previous capacity as Deputy Secretary General of the Presidency. As in the past, he promises to be a friendly, open interlocutor, noteworthy for his loyalty to Biya and his even keel. He concluded our meeting by noting the "real friendship" between our countries, and seemed to take on board the Ambassador's remarks that our occasional criticisms of Cameroon are meant in a spirit of friendship. Yang is seen to be honest and his indication that others may go to jail for corruption may signal troubles for his predecessor as PM, Ephriam Inoni, who is implicated in corruption charges about the purchase of an airplane for the now-defunct Cameroon Airlines. Unfortunately, Yang does not come across as having an energetic agenda or new approaches to reinvigorate the bureaucracy, which Cameroon so badly needs.
End comment.

Biography

¶18. (U) Yang was Deputy Secretary General of the Presidency from 2004 to June 30, 2009. He was Ambassador (later High Commissioner) to Canada (1984-2004), during which time he was President of the Cartegena Protocol on the Prevention of Biotechnological Risks. He also served as Minister of Mines and Energy (1979-1984), Vice Prime Minister of Territorial Administration (1975-1979) and State Prosecutor in Buea (1975). He holds a B.A. in law from the University of Yaounde, an M.A. in law from the University of Ottawa, an MBA from Century University in New Mexico, and diplomas from the National School of Administration (ENAM) and International Institute for Public Administration in Paris. He was born on June 14, 1947 in Jikejem-Oku, Bui Division, North West Region. An Anglophone (with excellent French), he is married

with three children.
GARVEY